



K-12 Student Success: Out-of-School Time Initiative

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

A Learning Brief

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The K-12 Student Success: Out-of-School Time Initiative is focused on boosting student success among Oregon's middle school students. The Oregon Community Foundation and The Ford Family Foundation are currently funding 21 organizations that provide out-of-school-time programming (e.g., after school or summer) to rural students, students of color and low-income students. Funded programs emphasize academic support, positive adult role models and family engagement. This learning brief summarizes what is known about the importance of academic support from existing research and shares what we are learning about the efforts of the Initiative grantees to provide academic support through out-of-school time programming. We hope that this description of the work of the Initiative grantees helps build understanding of the practices and experiences of out-of-school time programs in Oregon.

WHAT IS ACADEMIC SUPPORT IN OST?

What the Literature Says

Out-of-school time (OST) includes “both traditional programs operating during afternoon hours and more comprehensive efforts that respond to the needs of children, youth and parents during evenings, weekend, summers and holidays by offering activities [and services] that help youth grow, learn, and develop,” as defined by American Youth Policy Forum (2006). High-quality OST programs can provide valuable academic support to participating students in many ways, in addition to providing safe space and supervision for many youth who would otherwise be without supervision while parents or guardians are working. According to existing literature, academic support in high-quality OST programs most commonly includes the following four components.

Learning opportunities adapted for OST: Quality OST programs blend academic learning and enrichment activities and allow for innovative approaches to learning that may not be available during the school day. There is also great opportunity in OST to provide learning opportunities that are adapted to individual and small group needs (Beckett, 2009; Little, 2009). OST activities can and should be “interactive, hands on, learner directed and related to the real world, while remaining grounded in academic learning goals” (Beckett, p. 29). The research-based Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) framework provides guidance about what academic skill building efforts can look like in OST programming. Specifically, learning opportunities should make connections to the school day and provide intentional opportunities to improve academic skills, and also should utilize strategies that encourage youth to work through problems and that link success to effort, strategy or persistence.

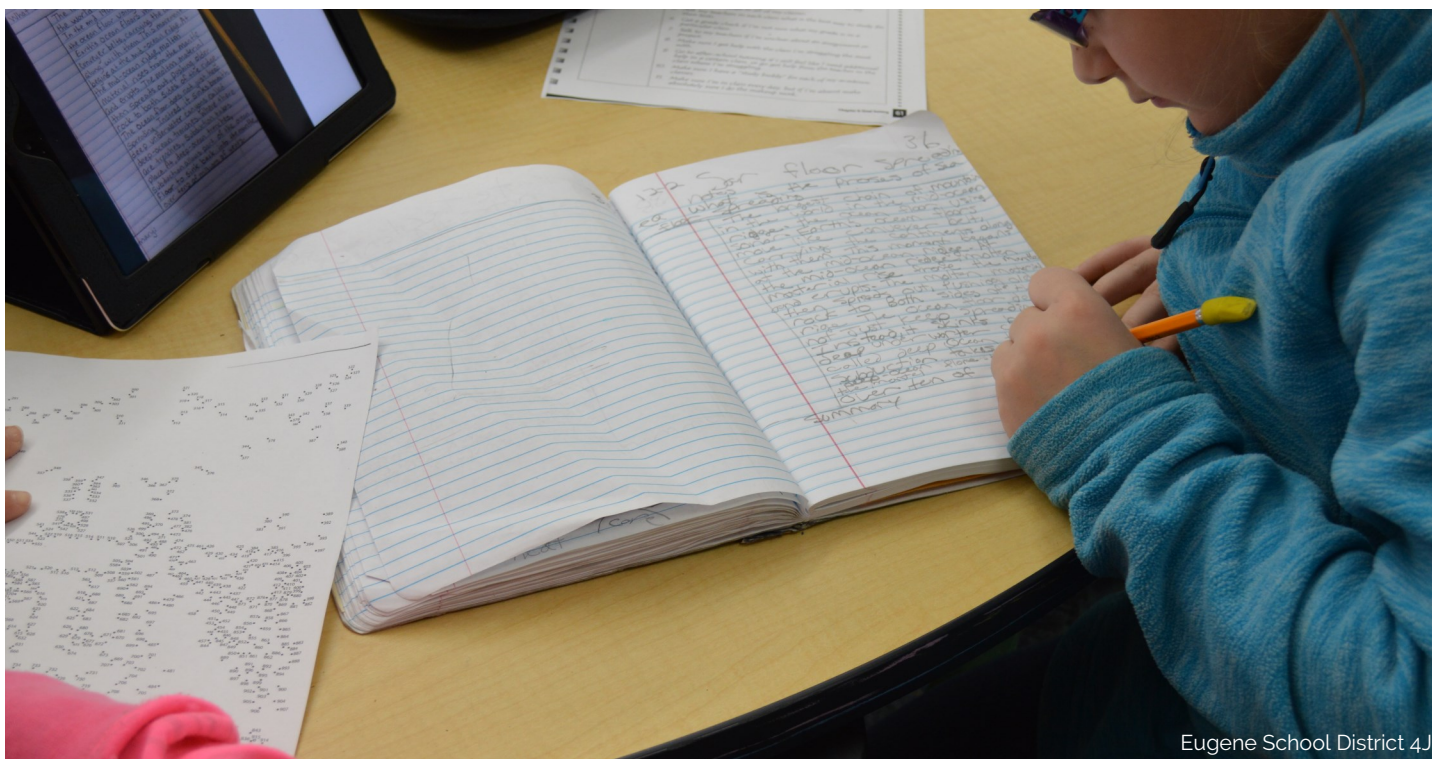
Alignment of OST programming with school-day learning and curriculum: Quality OST programs can also intentionally implement curriculum or activities that align with school-day learning to either extend or reinforce the concepts that students are learning in their



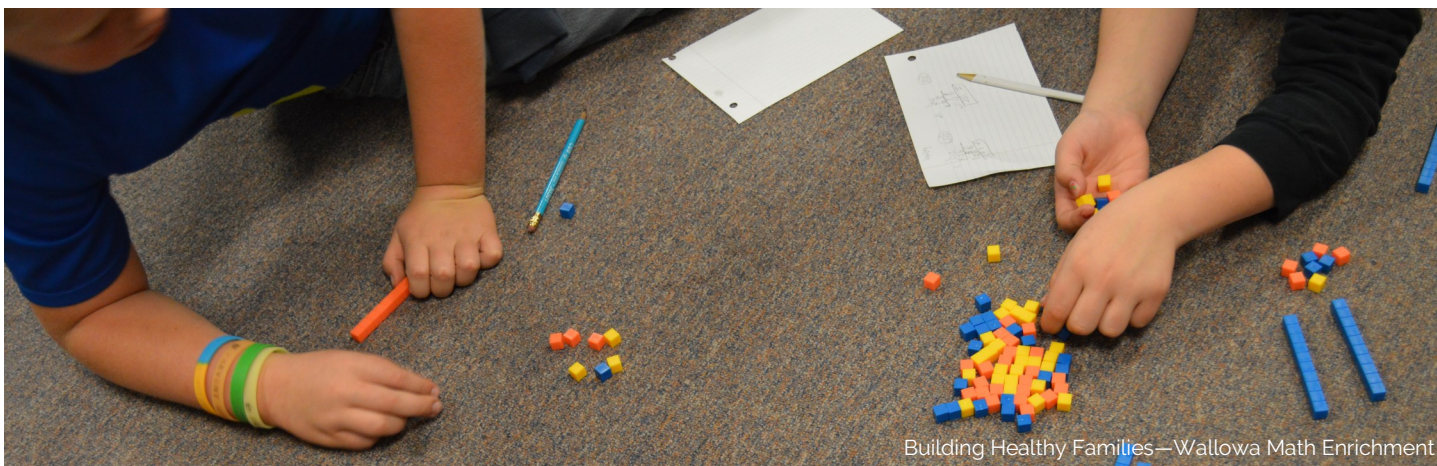
regular classrooms (Beckett, 2009). This typically requires that OST program staff have knowledge of school-day curriculum, and can relate program activities back to school-day learning, plan lessons around content standards (e.g., the Next Generation Science Standards), and/or provide homework help, tutoring or reflections on the school day (Little, 2006).

Support for social-emotional learning: Quality OST programming that supports youth development often builds and reinforces the social-emotional skills that research shows are linked to academic success (Durlak & Weissberg, 2010; Farington et al., 2012). This can happen more formally through curriculum specifically designed to develop social-emotional skill. And it can also happen through the ways in which staff and students interact with one another throughout programming (e.g., when staff are responsive and encouraging or support students in working through challenges while letting students find their own solutions). "Preparing Youth to Thrive," a new "social-emotional learning field guide" from the Susan Crown Exchange and the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, provides additional, detailed guidance for OST programs on how to support social-emotional learning (Smith et al., 2016).

Help families navigate the school system and support student success: Finally, quality OST programs also help entire families navigate school systems and otherwise support student success. This can be especially important for families from cultures that have traditionally been disenfranchised from the formal school system and for families who are recent immigrants to the United States. See the learning brief on Family Engagement for more detail on this topic.



Eugene School District 4J



Building Healthy Families—Wallowa Math Enrichment



WHAT DOES ACADEMIC SUPPORT LOOK LIKE FOR THE K-12 INITIATIVE GRANTEES?

What We're Learning in Oregon

The current K-12 Initiative grantee programs have many of the characteristics described in the literature on quality academic supports. All are providing learning opportunities that are different than those typically provided in school classrooms, many are working diligently to align programming content with school-day learning and many provide homework and tutoring supports. Some of the grantees have strong relationships with schools and many are working intentionally to develop the social-emotional skills of their students.

Providing learning opportunities adapted for OST: All of the grantees provide learning opportunities that are different than those students typically have during school. This most often comes in the form of programming that is more experiential, hands on, interactive and more engaging than traditional classroom lessons. Over half of the grantees are providing subject-specific enrichment. The most straightforward examples are the STEM/STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) programs, but grantees also have programs providing focused math enrichment, and in reading and communications.

For example, the WREN Friday Science program of Wallowa Resources (a partner of Building Health Families) provides hands-on, experiential learning about the natural and cultural resources and history of Wallowa County in eastern Oregon. Students spend the bulk of their time outdoors doing activities like studying stream habitat, learning about the geology of the Wallowa Mountains and measuring trees. During one Friday Science session, students worked with a forester to measure trees to find one that would provide enough wood for their family for the year. Students were highly engaged — asking questions, making calculations and getting excited about finding “their” tree. Staff remarked that “students were doing math that you couldn’t get them to do in class. And they don’t even see it as math. They see it as a real-world problem.”

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-Program Staff

Aligning OST programming with school-day learning and curriculum:

Alignment with school-day learning and curriculum is perhaps the most challenging aspect of the grantees' efforts to support student success. Some are able to map their planning and activities to what students are learning in school based on conversations with teachers, while others have designed curriculum in alignment with existing standards like the Next Generation Science Standards. In general, curriculum alignment seems easier for grantees where teachers are employed as program staff and/or where enrichment programming content lends itself to alignment to standards, as with STEM programs. Grantees also make efforts to align OST programming with school-day learning more informally, such as by asking students what they are learning in school, and making connections to programming.

About two-thirds of grantees provide homework help or tutoring. Some grantees noted that students in middle school (especially the first year) sometimes have particular trouble staying organized, which can prevent them from getting work done and turned in on time. During homework or tutoring time, program staff and volunteers (e.g., university students) coach students to help them figure out what they need to get done, prioritize the work and get started. These skills are also reinforced by grantees who are aligning OST programming with interventions used in schools, such as Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), which includes goal-setting and organizational supports for students.

Supporting social-emotional learning: The K-12 grantees are working to develop the social-emotional skills of their students both formally and informally. Several grantees use curriculum designed to support social-emotional skills development (e.g., Thrive), but the majority do so primarily through the way that staff and students interact and through activities meant to support students. Activities like community circle can help students reflect on their goals, and staff can encourage students to help build confidence and coach them to think about their future. In addition, almost a third of grantees are working explicitly on building cultural identity and belonging.

Several grantees note that goal setting with students is a good way to both support social-emotional growth and help them stay on track academically. One grantee describes staff working with students to create individual plans to raise one letter grade in one core class. Students have the freedom to determine which class and to make a plan for how they will do it, with guidance from staff.

“We try to make it feel attainable. By focusing on one class, they learn transferrable skills that they can use to succeed in other classes.”

-Grantee Leader

WHY IS ACADEMIC SUPPORT IMPORTANT?

What the Literature Says

A fundamental goal of the K-12 Student Success Initiative and most OST programs in general is to increase student success, especially for those students who are experiencing the achievement gap — falling behind in terms of traditional markers of student success (e.g., graduation). In Oregon, like in many other states, the achievement gap is experienced by students of color, students from low-income families and students in rural communities.

According to the Oregon Department of Education, the four-year cohort graduation rate in Oregon was just over 76 percent for the 2014-2015 school year. Unfortunately, graduation rates for Native Americans/Alaskan Natives was just under 55 percent, for Hispanic/Latino students just under 67 percent, and for Black/African American students about 62.5 percent. Economically disadvantaged students graduation rate was almost 66.5 percent. Equivalent figures are not available for rural students.

Research dating back to the late 1980s illustrates a positive relationship between high-quality OST and student success (Fashola, 1998; Farmer-Hinton, 2009; Little, 2009; Moore & Hamilton, 2010; and more). Studies show that quality OST programs can improve student attendance and engagement with school, boost social-emotional skills, and improve academic performance, which in turn increases the likelihood of high school graduation and post-secondary attainment. For example, recent studies of 21st Century Community Learning Centers have shown that school attendance, behavior and grade promotion improve for students participating in high-quality programs (American Institutes for Research, 2013; Naftzger et al., 2015).

Research also indicates that more intentional, structured and intensive programs are more likely to result in improved student success (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; Kidron & Lindsay, 2014). One study found that structured programs with strong alignment to school curricula are more successful (Turner, 2013). A meta-analysis of extended learning, including after-school and summer programs, found small but valuable effects of increased learning time on literacy and math skill development. Programs where certified teachers led programming and where instruction style mirrored traditional instruction were particularly successful (Kidron & Lindsay, 2014).

Successful academic support programs are also positively associated with social-emotional skills such as creativity, resiliency and problem-solving, which in turn increase success in school and life. The meta-analysis described above also found that experiential learning was linked to social-emotional skill gains (Farrington et al., 2012; Kidron & Lindsay, 2014).



HOW DO WE DEFINE STUDENT SUCCESS?

It is important to note that for the purposes of the K-12 Initiative, we define student success primarily in terms of traditional academic outcomes (e.g., graduation). However, we recognize that the social-emotional development of students plays a vital role in ensuring their success in academics and beyond. Students need social-emotional skills like a mindset that they can succeed and the ability to work through challenges. A learning brief with additional detail about social-emotional learning in the K-12 Initiative is forthcoming.

Furthermore, OST programs have been proven to be most effective with students experiencing the achievement gap — those performing below standards, minority students and lower-income youth (Redd et al., 2012; Kidron & Lindsay, 2014). OST can counteract many of the institutional barriers experienced by some students.

It also is important to note that maximizing student participation and engagement is necessary in order to ensure positive outcomes for youth. The perfect amount of participation and extent of engagement is not yet known. One study found that academic outcomes for students who participated 50 days or more in after-school programming over two years were significantly better than outcomes for comparable students who did not participate (Kauh, 2011). Recent research in five states showed positive effects on academic achievement, behavior, retention and attendance for students who participated 60 days or more in programs (Smith, 2014).

Some research has focused specifically on the impact of summer break and summer programming for youth. Low-income students lose approximately two months of reading achievement over the summer, while their higher-income peers often gain ground (McCombs et al., 2011). This summer learning loss is cumulative and over time can contribute significantly to the achievement gap. Evaluations of robust summer learning programs have shown that they mitigate summer learning loss and can even lead to two to five months of achievement gains in math and reading. These positive effects can last for at least two years after the student engages in a summer program.



Oregon MESA

HOW CAN PROGRAMS STRENGTHEN ACADEMIC SUPPORT?

What the Literature Says

The literature confirms that aligning content in OST programming with what happens during the school day is especially challenging. Some OST programs can be hesitant to make programming too much like in-school time (Little, 2006). Administrative and logistical challenges such as lack of communication or willingness on the part of the school or OST provider, workload of school staff, time constraints, and other similar problems are common (Farmer-Hinton, 2009). It is notable that these challenges typically worsen in the transition to middle and high school (Naftzger, 2013). However, there are many ways that OST programs can strengthen academic supports, and it is possible to build alignment with school-day learning. Below are four strategies found in the literature.

Improve program quality: OST programs are likely to benefit most from efforts to strengthen academic support as part of a broader effort to assess and improve program quality. Existing research clearly indicates that program quality is connected to student success (Smith, 2012 and others). It follows that increasing aspects of instructional quality such as establishing a safe and supportive environment and promoting youth reflection and choice would also strengthen any academic support activities implemented by OST programs.

Strengthen student engagement: Without good student participation and engagement with OST programming, it is hard to imagine that positive student outcomes would follow. There are many ways that OST programs can work to increase student participation and engagement, including learning about family needs for transportation and other supports that would make it more feasible for students to attend, as well as ensuring that program activities reflect what both students and their parents want and need – this may mean providing food or enrichment or recreational activities that draw students in and ensure they return (Beckett, 2009).

Ensure staff are well trained: Skilled staff are a necessary resource for high-quality programs working to support academic success (Huang, 2011; Little, 2009; Katz, 2013). The core functions of any OST program are carried out through interactions between staff and students (hence the focus on staff-student interactions in the Youth Program Quality Assessment framework). Staff must be sufficiently experienced and trained, and be able to relate well to students (Huang, 2011; Little, 2009). Staff retention is a common concern among OST providers; high-quality programs are able to recruit and retain staff so that they have greater longevity, build more expertise and experience, and have the potential to develop deeper relationships with students (Huang, 2011). There may be a need to deepen professional development – one study found that only 26 percent of staff had regular professional development opportunities annually; half of staff for homework-focused programs reported no professional development opportunities (Huang, 2011).

Deepen partnership with schools: Deepening coordination and collaboration between OST programs and schools can result in shared space, staff and/or information, all of which can help OST programs to strengthen the support they provide to students. Many OST programs co-locate with schools when classrooms, gym space or other resources are made available. When teachers and other school staff are engaged with OST programming directly by serving as staff or volunteers, there is great opportunity for increased communication between programs and evidence that this results in increased learning (Little, 2006).

To help build partnership between OST providers and schools, OST leaders can work to communicate their value in providing complimentary learning and in building academic identity of students, and can work intentionally to build relationships with school leaders, teachers and other key staff, sharing information about student needs. Likewise, schools can seek to support OST programs by sharing space, referring students, communicating with programs about students and curriculum, and considering shared staffing models or other ways to help extend school-day learning into OST programming (Little, 2009).





SUCCESSSES WITH ACADEMIC SUPPORT

What We're Learning in Oregon

Many of the successes related to academic support experienced by grantees reflect the strategies described in existing literature. It is noteworthy that all grantees' experiences are not the same: some are experiencing successes with aspects of academic support that others find more challenging.

Integrating academic learning and social-emotional skill development into OST programming: Many of the K-12 grantees are weaving together enrichment programming, academic learning and social-emotional learning.

For example, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs OST programming is teaching students native languages and cultural traditions, and blends math and writing into programming. For example, during root season the program teaches students about the seasons, climate and plants. Program staff speak eloquently and enthusiastically about the importance of building student connection to language and culture: "Inside of our language ... it holds our value system. Once you pick up the language you become who you are." "[Students] need to know both [academics and culture] to be comfortable in our community and outside our community." Elders who teach programming note that student confidence and cultural agility is growing as a result of their participation.

Embedding OST staff into school: For about a third of the K-12 grantees, OST program staff spend time in schools during the school day. A few describe this as "embedding" or "integrating" themselves in a school. These staff spend time during the school day in school staff meetings, visiting classrooms, talking to school counselors and checking in with teachers. The presence of OST staff during the school day results in school leaders and teachers seeing the OST programs as important resources. It also facilitates the alignment of academic support efforts in OST with school-day learning. Teachers are more easily able to share information with OST staff (and vice versa), so OST staff find it easier to understand and meet students' needs. In addition, staff-student relationships can deepen because students see staff as present and available as a resource during the school day in addition to after school.

“Having after-school staff there during the school day is critical. The more that we know what happens during the school day, the better we can do after school.”

-Grantee Program Staff

Coordinating and collaborating with school leaders and staff: Many of the K-12 grantees benefit from strong partnerships with schools. Grantees expressed that schools begin to see them as an important resource and valuable partner once they have seen the quality of programming and support they provide.

Seven of the K-12 Initiative grantees are themselves schools (or programs run by schools). This comes with distinct advantages when it comes to sharing space, staff and information. But these are not the only programs that are finding success in coordinating and collaborating. Almost two-thirds of grantees have teachers or school staff acting as program staff and receive information regularly from schools about students, or have access more directly to student information through parent portals or special permissions.

Almost all of the non-school grantees hold programming in classrooms or other spaces in schools (e.g., libraries). One grantee, who recently shifted from hosting programming at their own space to locating in the school, is seeing an increase in referrals from teachers to the program. Staff described an incident in which three students, one of whom was an OST program participant, were suspended from school. The program lead was able to facilitate conversations with the school to clarify the situation and advocate for the students, resulting in at least one returning to school.

Supporting students in completing homework: Though this is also not without its challenges, many of the grantees are dedicating time and support to help students complete homework. According to parents, this is one of the greatest benefits of the grantee programs, relieving them of the battle that sometimes can occur over homework and helping their students catch up when they fall behind. One of the most important roles that OST programs can play in helping students with homework may actually be in helping them stay organized. One grantee that focuses the bulk of available program time on homework completion reports that their 28-30 students complete 40-50 homework assignments during programming each week.



CHALLENGES WITH ENGAGING FAMILIES

What We're Learning in Oregon

The challenges experienced by K-12 Student Success grantees include:

Keeping students engaged in academic activity: It can be difficult for students to stay focused, especially in the after-school hours, when they may simply be tired from attending class all day. Helping students get organized, prioritize their work, get started and then stay on task while completing homework can require one-on-one or very small group program structures. This is uncommon in OST, which more typically has staff-student ratios between 1:6 or 1:15 with students of middle school age. Asking students to engage in a school-like activity or to work on challenging homework has proven disengaging for some grantee programs. One grantee is working to adapt existing curriculum that felt too similar to school-day lessons so that it is more experiential and hands on, which they expect will help keep students more engaged.

“Every kid seems to need something different at the same time.”

-Grantee Program Staff

Sufficient qualified staff: Staff-student ratios have enormous implications for the capacity of OST program to provide academic support. Some program leaders acknowledge that with more trained staff they would be able to better support students. One program leader noted that it is especially frustrating for staff if they feel they can't help students enough — often this is because they either aren't able to work closely enough with individual students, or aren't expert enough in teaching the content that students are learning. Staff need to be sufficiently trained in order to provide good academic support, and have historically not had access to such training in Oregon .

Supporting wide-ranging student needs: Many students are participating in K-12 Initiative grantee programs because they need extra academic or social support. However, students may be in very different places developmentally; middle school in particular is a time when the developmental “ages” of students in the same grade can vary greatly. Determining and then responding to the wide range of student needs is one of the biggest challenges for grantee staff. When not all students are working on the same assignments or projects, it can be especially difficult to support all students. Even those grantees who have access to student academic data (e.g., grades) note that they are often only aware of problems after they arise; they would prefer to know that a student needs support ahead of a failed exam or poor grade.

Gaining investment from school leaders and teachers: A lack of understanding and investment from school leaders and teachers is a great frustration for some grantees, including those with relatively close relationships to schools (including school-run programs). Some OST programs feel they do not always receive the recognition they should from schools for the role that they play in supporting youth.

One grantee noted that there were many misperceptions about the OST program on the part of teachers, that program staff have had to “prove themselves” and the value of the programming to teachers. Others, particularly those engaging teachers as program staff, are frustrated by teacher turnover and are concerned about teachers being over-worked.

Alignment of OST programming content with in-school learning:

Grantees also expressed frustration about their efforts to align OST programming content to school learning. They noted that they are often not sufficiently aware of what students are working on in school. Even for grantees who are school-based, it can be difficult to get the kind of information needed from teachers in advance in order to plan programming. One school-based grantee noted that “teachers were asked early on to let program staff know what students are working on, but this hasn’t been consistent.” More formal work to align curriculum can take a great deal of planning and resources to execute well; most community-based organizations are not well equipped to do such curriculum development effectively or efficiently themselves.

Partnering with families: Program staff struggle to know how to help parents understand the value of education, especially parents who may have had difficult experiences with the education system themselves. Some grantees also expressed frustration at a perceived lack of family support for student success. It may also be the case that some parents are supporting their students in ways not immediately visible to program staff — parents who participated in focus groups often noted that one of the main ways that they support their students’ success is by making sure they attend OST programming. A separate learning brief on Family Engagement is available for those interested in more information on how grantees are engaging families.

The challenges experienced by grantees in trying to support academic success overlap in many ways. Supporting students well requires qualified staff and would be easier for OST programs if they had information from teachers and schools, which requires that school leaders and teachers are supportive of OST programming. Academic skill building is one of the areas of the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) that grantees score lowest on. YPQA scores from 2015-2016 indicate that they are especially challenged in clearly communicating learning objectives, and supporting students in practicing skills and reflecting on learning strategies.

“[Schools] are partners - they provide information and encouragement - but we’re not considered as important as we would like.”

-Grantee Program Staff

ABOUT THIS LEARNING BRIEF

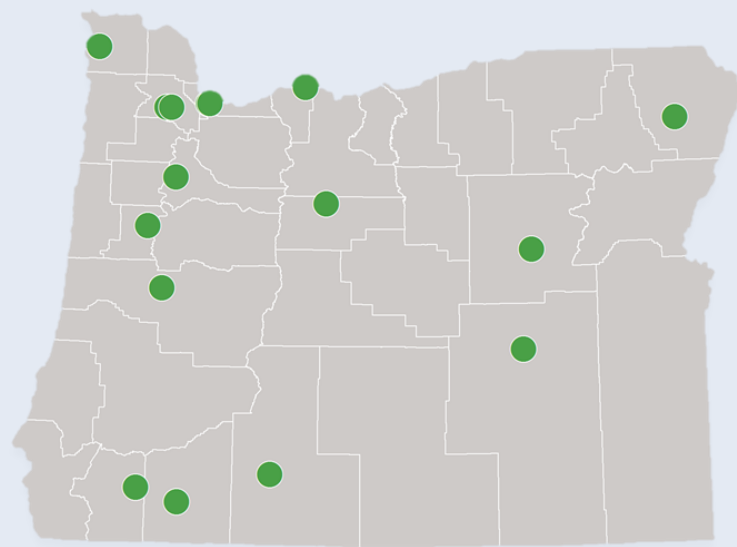
The K-12 Student Success: Out-of-School Time Initiative began in late 2013 and is currently ongoing. The goal of the Initiative is to help close the achievement gap for students in Oregon by raising awareness of the importance of supporting students in their middle school years and the valuable role of out-of-school time (OST) programs in supporting student success.

Through the K-12 Student Success: Out-of-School Time Initiative, The Oregon Community Foundation and The Ford Family Foundation are currently funding 21 organizations that provide OST programming (e.g., after school and summer) to rural students, students of color and low-income students. These programs emphasize academic support, positive adult role models and family engagement.

This learning brief summarizes what is known about the importance of academic support through existing research as well as the successes and challenges of the Initiative grantees in providing academic support through their OST programming. Information included in this brief was gathered through a number of Initiative evaluation activities completed to date — these include literature review, interviews with grantee staff and leaders, the Youth Program Quality Assessment process and focus groups with parents and guardians. This brief is one of several developed and published by the Research Department at The Oregon Community Foundation to share what we're learning during the Initiative with practitioners and other stakeholders in order to build understanding of the practices and experiences of OST programs in Oregon.

Cover Photo: Camp Fire Columbia

2016 K-12 STUDENT SUCCESS INITIATIVE GRANTEES



21 Grantees
are currently funded
through the K-12 Student
Success Initiative.

Adelante Mujeres
Building Healthy Families
Camp Fire Columbia
Centro Cultural
Chiloquin Jr Sr High School
College Dreams
Confederated Tribes of Warm
Springs

Eugene School District 4J
Grant School District #3
Hacienda CDC
Hood River County SD
Human Solutions, Inc.
I Have a Dream Foundation
Kids Club of Harney County
Kids Unlimited

Latino Network
Open Meadow
Oregon MESA
OSU SMILE
Self Enhancement, Inc.
Sunset Empire Parks and
Recreation District

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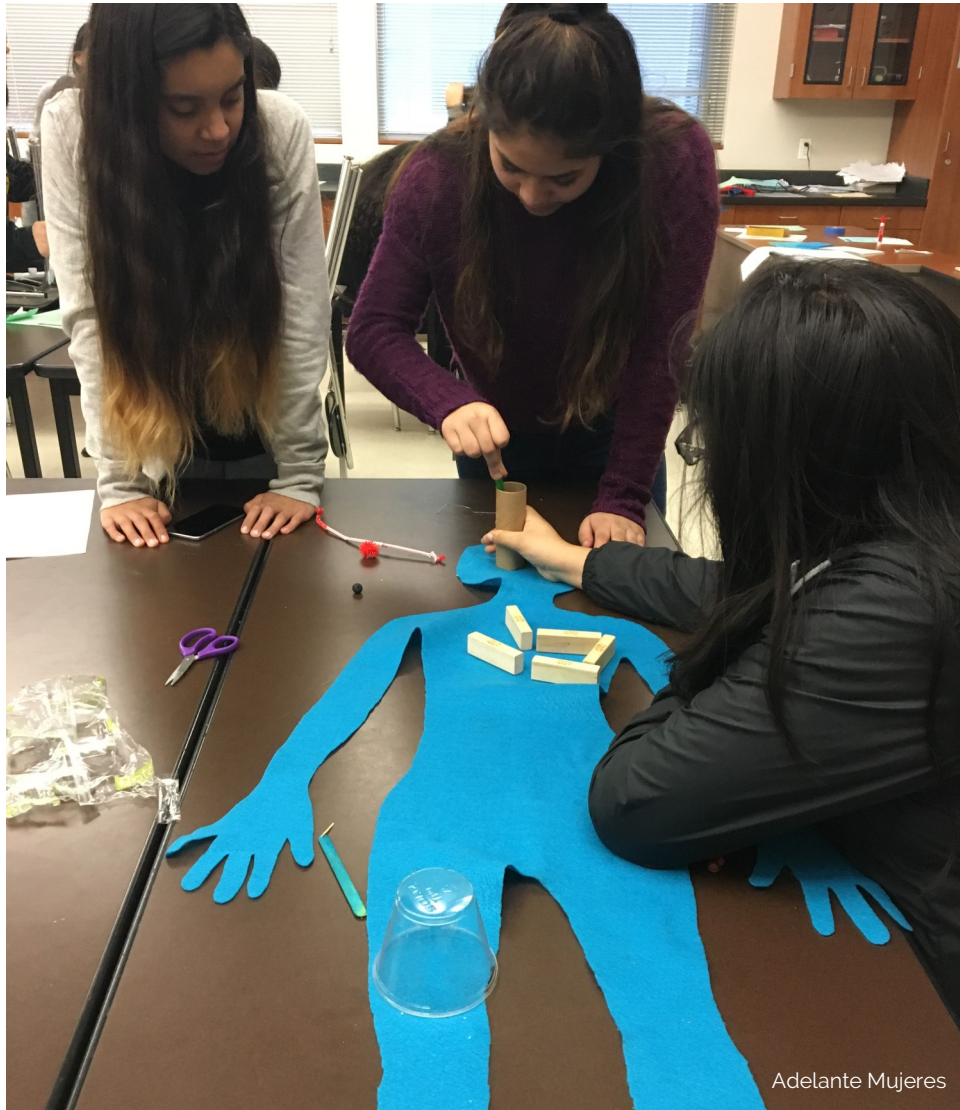
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Suggested Resources for Practitioners

The Afterschool Alliance publishes many briefs, factsheets and reports summarizing existing research – <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/>

Structuring out-of-school time to improve academic achievement: A practice guide

Preparing Youth to Thrive: Promising Practices in Social Emotional Learning



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